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AMERICAN DEFENSE SPENDING -- PERSUASION AND POLITICS

ANNCR:

THE FORD ADMINISTRATION HAS RELEASED NEW INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES OF INCREASED MILITARY SPENDING BY THE SOVIET UNION IN AN EFFORT TO GAIN SUPPORT OF ITS OWN REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL DEFENSE FUNDS. VOA NEWS ANALYST EDWARD CONLEY HAS THESE THOUGHTS:

VOICE:

NEW CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY FIGURES ESTIMATE SOVIET UNION DEFENSE SPENDING AT ONE HUNDRED FIFTY THREE THOUSAND MILLION DOLLARS FOR THE COMING YEAR, OVER THIRTY PERCENT MORE THAN THE ADMINISTRATION DEFENSE BUDGET REQUEST NOW BEFORE CONGRESS. IN RELEASING THOSE FIGURES (ON THURSDAY), SECRETARY OF DEFENSE DONALD RUMSFELD WAS QUICK TO MAKE CLEAR THAT THE SITUATION DOES NOT POSE ANY IMMINENT THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES. THE AMERICAN POLICY OF "ROUGH EQUIVALENCE" TO THE SOVIET UNION IN MILITARY CAPABILITY IS BEING MAINTAINED. BUT, IN THE CONTINUING ADMINISTRATION PUSH FOR INCREASED MILITARY SPENDING, THE DEFENSE SECRETARY RESTATED THE CONTENTION THAT IF THE TREND OF UPWARD SPIRALLING DEFENSE OUTLAYS BY MOSCOW COUPLED WITH WHAT AMOUNT TO INFLATION-INDUCED CUTS IN AMERICA'S MILITARY BUDGET CONTINUES, THE UNITED STATES ALMOST INEVITABLY WILL FIND ITSELF IN AN INFERIOR STATUS. MISTER RUMSFELD ADDED SUCH WEAKNESS COULD ENTICE AGGRESSION AND SAID HE DOESN'T BELIEVE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT A POLICY OF MILITARY INFERIORITY.

AS MISTER RUMSFELD SPOKE, THERE WERE GROWING SIGNS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION APPEAL IS BEGINNING TO GET SOME ATTENTION AND SUPPORT...A DIFFICULT JOB DURING A NATIONAL ELECTION YEAR WHICH TRADITIONALLY SEES FEDERAL FUNDS CHANNELED TO DOMESTIC EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS RATHER THAN TO FOREIGN ITEMS. A LIBRARY OF CONGRESS STUDY PUBLISHED RECENTLY CONCLUDES THAT THE QUANTITATIVE MILITARY BALANCE HAS SHIFTED TO THE SOVIET UNION WHILE THE QUALITATIVE ADVANTAGE OF THE UNITED STATES IS "SLOWLY SLIPPING AWAY." THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORTS THAT STUDY HAS HAD A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON A NUMBER OF LEGISLATORS.

U.S. DEFENSE SPENDING, MEANWHILE, HAS FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS YEAR BECOME A CAMPAIGN ISSUE. ON THE SAME DAY DEFENSE SECRETARY RUMSFELD WAS PRESSING FOR A BIGGER DEFENSE BUDGET IN WASHINGTON, RONALD REAGAN -- THE CHALLENGER FOR THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION -- WAS TELLING A CAMPAIGN CROWD IN FLORIDA THE FORD ADMINISTRATION MUST BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR WHAT HE CALLED THE MILITARY DECLINE OF THE UNITED STATES. WHITE HOUSE AIDES DISMISSED THE CHARGE, POINTING INSTEAD TO WHAT THEY TERMED THE PRESIDENT'S LEADERSHIP IN KEEPING U.S. DEFENSES SECOND TO NONE.

IT'S FAR TOO SOON TO PREDICT THE ULTIMATE FATE OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S REQUESTED HIKE IN DEFENSE SPENDING. BUT THE INCREASE IN SOVIET MILITARY STRENGTH IS HAVING A SOBERING EFFECT IN THE UNITED STATES. (OPT) THERE WILL BE THE USUAL AND NECESSARY DEBATE ON WHERE AND HOW DEFENSE FUNDS SHOULD BE SPENT -- WHETHER THE GO-AHEAD SHOULD BE GIVEN

TO NEW AND EXPENSIVE WEAPONS SYSTEMS OR WHETHER EXISTING DEFENSE CAPABILITITIES SHOULD BE IMPROVED AND MODERNIZED.

(END OPT)

IT'S UNLIKELY THE ADMINISTRATION WILL RECEIVE ALL OF THE DEFENSE FUNDS IT HAS REQUESTED...THAT SELDOM HAPPENS. BUT WITH THE WARNINGS BEING SOUNDED BY THE ADMINISTRATION AND OTHERS, THE CHANCES OF SOME INCREASE IN U.S. DEFENSE SPENDING TO MAINTAIN THE NECESSARY SOVIET-AMERICAN "ROUGH EQUIVALENCE" IN MILITARY CAPABILITY SEEM GOOD -- EVEN IN AN ELECTION YEAR.

GH/LP